



LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, CHAIR
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **October 5, 2009**, in Room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim accounting or transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi	Steven M. Olivas, Esq.
Patricia Curry	Tina Pedersen, LCSW
Ann Franzen	Martha Trevino Powell
Susan F. Friedman	Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Helen A. Kleinberg	Dr. Harriette F. Williams
Dr. La-Doris McClaney	

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Rev. Cecil L. Murray	Stacey Savelle
Sandra Rudnick	

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Sorkin at 10:00 a.m.

Chair Sorkin announced the passing of Commissioner Nancy Daly on October 2, 2009, and the Commission recognized her contributions as an advocate for children's rights.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

Self introductions were made.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Action

On motion by Commissioner Trevino Powell, seconded by Commissioner Kleinberg, the item regarding approval of the 2008-09 Annual Report was deferred to a future meeting, and the Agenda for October 5, 2009, was unanimously approved.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- **September 21, 2009**

Action

Commissioner Kleinberg requested the following amendment to the minutes on Page 2, under Chair's Report: "...she also voiced concerns regarding the workload of the Chair ~~in the transition~~ without an Executive Director."

On motion of Commissioner Kleinberg, seconded by Commissioner Trevino Powell, the minutes for September 21, 2009, were unanimously approved as amended.

V. CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Sorkin reported that in December 2008, the Commission sent a letter to the Board regarding its finding on childhood obesity. Following a presentation to the Board by Vice Chair Pederson and her, the Board in April 2009, on motion of Supervisor Knabe, directed the Chief Executive Officer to convene a Child Wellness Workgroup.

Vice Chair Pedersen provided an update on the motion and reported the following:

- Brian Mahan, CEO, has been leading the Child Wellness Workgroup meetings, at which the County Departments and other stakeholders have collaborated to develop the Child Wellness Policy (Policy). Members included the Departments of Public Health, Children and Family Services, Probation, Health, Mental Health, Parks and Recreation, the Commission for Children and Families (Commission), First 5 LA, Child Care Planning Committee, Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Committee, and other stakeholders.
- In October 2009, the Policy will be presented to the Board of Supervisors. Policy will include information on psychotropic medications, a training component, preventative measures for fighting obesity, as well as recommendations by the Commission that were included in its letter to the Board (i.e. having up-to-date nutritional and physical activity guidelines in contracts for out-of-home placement).
- Once the Policy is approved by the Board, the Workgroup will meet quarterly to monitor its progress and implementation in the County.

Commissioner Kleinberg inquired if the Policy addresses the financial burden that will be placed on caregivers for the purchase of fruits and vegetable as part of a nutritional regimen. Chair Sorkin responded that discussions have taken place with the workgroups, and one recommendation that has come forward is that of providing relative caregivers with vouchers to Farmers' Markets, when they attend trainings, as an incentive to purchase fruits and vegetables. She added that the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children's) Program does this, and that as of October 1, 2009, WIC has changed its food plan by replacing its high-caloric foods. Whole milk has been eliminated in favor of lower fat milk; fruits, vegetables, and whole grains have been increased. There are added incentives for mothers who breastfeed.

Commissioner Kleinberg suggested that after the Board adopts the policy, the workgroup should begin looking at specific issues.

Action Taken:

Commissioner Pedersen's verbal report was received and filed by the Commission.

Letter to the Board regarding securing birth certificates:

Chair Sorkin distributed copies of the revised draft letter to the Board of Supervisors regarding the securing of birth certificates for children and youths supervised by DCFS and Probation. The letter outlines issues raised by the Alliance for Children's Rights, and has a five-point recommendation plan.

The Commission reviewed the letter, and made the following recommended changes:

- The letter to include copies to Judge Michael Nash, the Public Defender, the Alternate Public Defender, and the Alliance for Children's Rights.
- The scope of the recommendation, to approve and implement guidelines for obtaining birth certificates for children and youth under respective DCFS and Probation jurisdiction, is broadened to all children regardless of their age and the manner by which they leave the systems.
- A recommendation is added to hire a paralegal, at the court, to aid in the process of securing birth certificates in cases where a birth certificate is not in place. Vice Chair Curry proposed renumbering this recommendation to #5, and that the original recommendation #5 is changed to recommendation #6.
- The Alliance for Children's Rights recommended that background information on this issue is included in the letter.

Action Taken

Motion by Commissioner Williams, seconded by Commissioner McClaney, the letter to the Board of Supervisors regarding the securing of birth certificates for DCFS and Probation Children and Youth, was unanimously approved in concept with the recommended changes noted above.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

- **Relative Caregivers Committee**

Commissioner Williams thanked the members of the Relative Caregivers Committee (Commissioners Murray and Savelle) for their leadership and support. She added that there was a hiatus in leadership since Angela Carter's departure from DCFS. The Committee met on September 24, 2009, with members of DCFS, Maryam Fatemi, Germaine Key (ASFA Section), Michael Gray (Kinship Support Unit), Shirley Logan (Training Division), Teri Gilliams, and a CSULB intern.

Topics under review were:

- *The Vision of Relative Care and Past Accomplishments of Kinship Care.* Concerns were raised regarding the current direction of Kinship Care. The Kinship Support Division, as designed by former DCFS Director, Dr. David Sanders, was developed with ASFA and Support Unit staff. The intent was that ASFA workers learn to be support advocates for relative caregiver and provide those services. Over time, the two units were divided and ASFA became regulatory. It currently conducts inspections of homes, and consequently does not offer relative caregivers the kind of support services, as originally intended.
- *Kinship Care Funding.* Title IV-E Funds for Kinship Care were discussed. To date, only two Kinship Support Centers have been established. Support centers that were to be made available through this funding, to all DCFS offices, have not yet been established. Concern and uncertainty remain as to where these funds and other stimulus money, originally set for Kinship Care, were redirected.
- *DCFS Training Academy.* The elimination of DCFS Training, in both the academy and regions, was discussed. The training model at CSULB was eliminated without notice.
- *Kinship Advocacy and Advisory Network (KAAN).* A new advocacy group, the Kinship Advocacy and Advisory Network (KAAN), was developed by DCFS. KAAN replaced the "Roundtable" group that was in existence for approximately 18 years. While it is a very well-planned advocacy group, the question remains as to whether this group is a good replacement for the "Roundtable." Commissioner Williams noted that KAAN is heavily agency-partnered, with the potential that agencies could be providers, resulting in conflicts of interest. KAAN needs more grass roots relatives' involvement. Overall, Commissioner Williams noted that she is impressed with the KAAN, and to date, has attended all its meetings.

- *Caseload Reductions and KinGAP.* Caseload reduction and its impact on KinGAP were discussed. Commissioner Williams commented that, in her opinion, DCFS encourages and supports KinGAP care in order to reduce the number of children serviced, thereby lowering caseloads. The Committee requested DCFS to provide KinGAP training to the Committee and the Commission (with the Chair's approval) in an effort to evaluate recommendations given to families.
- *Relative Caregiver Fact Sheet.* The Relative Caregiver Fact Sheet has been in the development stages for approximately two years and needs to be completed.
- *Kinship Care, a Priority for the Commission.* Kinship Care is a priority for the Commission. In a discussion with Maryam Fatemi, she commented that relative care is priority for DCFS' Executive team. Ms. Fatemi recommends that KinGap be discussed with the CEO. Commissioner Williams thanked Director Ploehn for reinstating Relative Care training within DCFS groups and the Academy.
- *Faith-Based Kinship Centers.* There is a need for Faith-Based Kinship Centers, and centers are currently being planned.

Action Taken

Commissioner Williams' verbal report was received and filed. Commissioner Williams reported that a meeting with Jackie White is scheduled for October 23, 2009.

• Nomination Committee

Commissioner Trevino Powell reported that Commissioner Williams made a motion at the last meeting to appoint three Vice Chairs to the Commission.

- ***Motion to Approve the Number of Vice Chairs for 2009-2010 Elections***

Action Taken

Commissioner Williams moved to approve three Vice Chairs for the 2009-2010 Elections. Commissioner McClaney seconded the motion, and it was unanimously carried.

- ***Motion to Approve the 2009-2010 Slate of Officers***

Commissioner Trevino Powell reported the following 2009-2010 Slate of Officers for the Commission for Children and Families:

Chair:	Patricia Curry
Vice Chairs:	Susan Friedman, Steven Olivas, and Stacey Savelle

Action Taken

The 2009-2010 Slate of Officers was unanimously approved.

- *Commission Election of Officers for 2009-2010*

Commissioner Trevino Powell announced that Vice Chair Curry was unanimously elected for the position of Chair. Commissioners, Steven Olivas, Stacey Savelle and Susan Friedman were unanimously elected to the positions of Vice Chairs.

VII. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

DCFS Director Trish Ploehn, thanked Chair Sorkin for her great partnership with DCFS during DCFS's dire times. She also congratulated Vice Chair Curry for her recent appointment to Chair of the Commission.

She added that although the August 17, 2009, meeting minutes were approved by the Commission, she wanted to clarify that there was no "Adoptions Study" as referred to on page 7, under "Follow-Up", paragraph 2. A "Re-entry Study" should have been referenced.

Director Ploehn reported the following:

- There have been no significant changes to the budget since the last Commission meeting; the Board of Supervisors approved its budget on September 22, 2009.
- On October 3, 2009, the Los Angeles Dodgers honored DCFS and The Heart Gallery, an organization dedicated to placing foster children with adoptive families. Seven children were highlighted and got to participate in the field during the game. They met with the team and with Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, who attended this event. DCFS calendars featuring photos of the Dodgers and the children that are currently available for adoption, as well as the Department's contact numbers, were distributed to attendees.
- Director Ploehn and Lisa Parrish, went to Sacramento and met with State representatives and other stakeholders to discuss the Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project (Waiver), its plans, and the feasibility of its extension for an additional amount of time. DCFS is approximately two and a half years into the Waiver, and an early start on the forthcoming Demonstration Project is important. The Waiver has shown great success in outcomes and fiscal effectiveness in Los Angeles and Alameda Counties. Outcome information will be used to move forward national reform on child welfare financing, and to collaborate with other agencies that have a Waiver. Advocating to extend waiver for Los Angeles and Alameda Counties for an additional amount of time. Florida has a Waiver, and is nine months ahead of Los Angeles and Alameda Counties. While Los Angeles and Alameda Counties focused on children that were in the Child Welfare System, Florida's focus was to prevent children from entering the System. An exchange of information is forthcoming.

- A demonstration to the Board on the Safety Enhancement Plan was provided at the September 29, 2009, Board meeting. The Board requested that DCFS come back with a report on computer-automated “alerts.” DCFS contracted with the Children’s Research Center, makers of the *Safe Measures* and *Structured Decision Making* (SDM). The Children’s Research Center has provided DCFS with the following alerts that would be generated when: 1) a family has three or more referrals; 2) two or more referrals for the same family within the last 12 months; 3) a family has a prior history of a critical incident or a child fatality; 4) there is a substantiated allegation that has indicated a high or very high risk for a child, and a case is not opened by DCFS; and 5) a child has no documentation of face to face contact with DCFS within 15 days of having an open case with DCFS. The “alerts” will assist Children Social Workers (CSWs), Managers, and Supervisors with case review processes --“alerts” will be generated as *pop ups* on computer reducing the amount of time spent on computer searches and review of case files. The automation portion of the “alert” system is expected to be completed in mid November 2009, followed by the development of policy and training.
- DCFS and a foster family agency were recently awarded a \$1 million grant by the Department of Health & Human Services. The grant money will be used to support Kinship Caregiver Programs. Processes by which the grant money will be allocated to training and outreach programs have not yet been established. The grant is for the next three years. Information will be provided to the Commission as it becomes available.
- DCFS has been receiving national attention for its *Point of Engagement Program* (POE), Program created and developed by Eric Marts. Most recently, a \$1.4 million grant was awarded to Milwaukee to institute POE. DCFS is excited that Mr. Marts is not only recognized nationally, but has a national program.

Commissioner Biondi inquired on the status of the Georgetown Juvenile Justice & Child Welfare Integration-Breakthrough Series Collaborative. Director Ploehn responded that she recently received information, and a flow chart on the project. The Georgetown Project is moving into a new phase, known as the Los Angeles Practice Model. This new collaborative will merge several departments, likely to include the DCFS, Probation, Public Health and Mental Health models into one. Due to money issues, new jurisdictions were not added, and instead, existing jurisdictions such as Los Angeles County were invited to participate in this new phase.

Commissioner Biondi inquired on the “tests of change” for the evolving Los Angeles Practice Model, and requested a report on this at a later date. Director Ploehn recommended a representative from DCFS and Probation to provide a report on their accomplishments, thus far.

Commissioner Kleinberg added that she would like DCFS to provide a presentation on how the Waiver has impacted DCFS in terms of programs for children and families.

Action Taken

The Director, Department of Children and Family Services' verbal report was received and filed with the understanding the following presentations would be provided in the future:

- Presentation by DCFS on program deliverables to DCFS and Probation resulting from Title IV- E Waiver funding.
- Presentation by DCFS on the Los Angeles County Practice Model (formerly the Georgetown Project).

VIII. PRESENTATION – EMERGENCY RESPONSE TRAINING ACADEMY

Mr. Eric Marts, Deputy Director, distributed documents regarding the Emergency Response Training Academy (Copies on file), and reported on changes to the front end of the DCFS processes and systemic changes that are being brought forward within the Emergency Response Training Academy to provide effective services for children who enter the DCFS system.

Commissioner Kleinberg commented on the use of squad cars on school campus, and stated that it discourages girls, in particular, from reporting sexual abuse cases because police presence attracts too much attention. She suggested more education and training to address this issue.

Ms. Williams expressed concerns about co-locating and CSWs caseload. Mr. Marts responded that co-locating is voluntary for CSWs as it implicates additional work for them, and they are still expected to carry their regular workload. Funding is being sought to add CSWs to specifically co-locate at schools. A time study is in the works to explore this possibility. Another avenue being exposed is that of parent and community involvement. Commissioner Williams suggested that DCFS co-locate CSWs that carry cases for children that attend the school.

Chair Sorkin inquired on the potential overburden to CSWs resulting from the requirement for completion of Structured Decision Making (SDM) assessment instrument in addition to the *Investigation Narrative*. Mr. Marts reported that CSWs have not expressed concerns for this requirement, and in fact, request involvement in every phase of abuse reporting.

Chair Sorkin inquired on the estimated time for linking families to services; Mr. Marts reported that services are provided within the same day, even in case of Mental Health Services.

Commissioner Kleinberg recommended that CSWs include common-law husbands (aka “boyfriends”) in the investigation process, since often time they are not procedurally questioned. Mr. Marts assured her that all individuals involved will be interviewed in the investigation and this recommendation will be added to the training module.

Action Taken

By Common Consent Mr. Marts' report was received and filed. Commissioner Kleinberg recommended that Children's Social Workers include common-law husbands (aka "boyfriends") in investigation processes; Mr. Marts confirmed that this recommendation will be incorporated to the ER training module.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

Andrea Aragon, Deputy, 1st Supervisorial District, presented exiting Chair Sorkin with a certificate honoring her outstanding service in spearheading the Commission for her terms in office.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chair Sorkin announced that the New Beginnings Conference will be held on November 3, 2009.

XI. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Sorkin at 11:40 a.m. in memory of Commissioner Nancy Daly.